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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 5762  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 3658  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2117  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 6886  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0755  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4249  
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: HAMAS Election Win, Lebanon, Prophet Muhammad Cartoons, Iraq (2/2)

**¶1.** Summary: Syrian papers reported President Asad's meeting with a delegation from the Council for the National Interest, a U.S. NGO. A SANA release stated that the talks dealt with ways of activating ties in the interest of both countries and thereby achieving security and stability in the region, through the language of dialogue and by listening to the views of the other. President Asad reviewed with the delegation Syria's stances on current events in the region. There was a discussion of terror and how to combat it, Iraq, and the latest developments in the Palestinian arena. The U.S. delegation stressed the importance of Syria's pivotal role in the region.

Edward Peck, Chairman of the Council for the National Interest, underlined the need for diplomatic dialogue between Syria and the US on issues of mutual concern, the region and international issues in general. Peck told reporters, after meeting FM Shara, that the delegation he is heading includes former diplomats and ambassadors of the United States and noted that it dedicates its work to bringing more balance to U.S. policy in the Middle East. He pointed out that the group might not agree with U.S. policy on many issues.

Peck said the delegation would put on its website a film about the visit and hold many meetings and seminars to explain the viewpoint of the officials the delegation had met. "The aim of this will be to find appropriate means to boost dialogue among countries, particularly between Syria and the U.S.," Peck said.

Syrian papers also featured a SANA statement that the Foreign Ministry has summoned the Syrian ambassador to Copenhagen for consultation and explanation of the measures taken by the Danish government against insults to the Prophet Mohammed that are a violation of sanctity and holiness to hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims.

End of summary.

**¶2.** Selected Headlines:

President Asad reviews with a delegation from the U.S. Council for the National Interest Syria's positions on events in the

region and means of reactivating US-Syria relations" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/2)

"Foreign Ministry summons Syrian Ambassador to Copenhagen for explanation of measures taken by the Danish government against condemned insults to the personality of Prophet Mohammed" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/2)

"Lebanese calls to solve the cabinet's crisis and to deal seriously with the Arab initiative" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/2)

"In response to HAMAS' victory, Israel suspends revenues of Palestinian taxes. Relief organizations warn against suspending aid to the Palestinian Authority" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/2)

"Straw announces the possibility of withdrawing British forces from Iraq. The National Reconciliation Front threatens a mutiny if militias are not dismantled and detainees released" (Government-owned Tishreen,

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Democracy Upon Request"

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Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/2): "No person, group, or party raising the slogan of resistance and fighting for freedom is allowed to assume power or enter Arab parliaments because they endanger world peace and security. This is the view of the champions of freedom, the

advocates of democracy, and defenders of human rights who occupy the White House and decision-making centers in the United States....

"Those who want to rule in the Arab world must recognize Israel's right not only to exist but also to practice aggression, occupation, destruction, intimidation, and terrorism.

"The United States does not have the right to impose its own version of democracy on the world. Is it not shameful for a superpower to threaten to cut off aid from peoples and to besiege and starve them only because they dare to choose their representatives in parliaments and governments...?"

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"Palestinian Victims and Blind Bias"

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Ahmad Suwan, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/2): "The American and European positions on aid to the Palestinian Authority appear as a kind of punishment of the Palestinian people for expressing their will, choosing their representatives, and deciding their own affairs and policies....

"These positions, taken under clear Israeli pressure, create obstacles in the way of the Palestinians as they seek to regain their rights and liberate their lands. The pressure on HAMAS renders a big service to the aggression and occupation and to Israeli policy, which has never served the interest of peace, security, and stability in the Palestinian territories or the region in general....

"The time has come to formulate an American policy, and even a European policy, without blind and absolute bias toward the Israeli occupation and without the Palestinian people being always the victims of this bias."

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"Symptoms of Bankruptcy"

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Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/2): "Repetition of the same anti-Syria statements, talk about a deal between Syria and the United States, and praise for the American position toward Syria are signs that the anti-Syria team in Lebanon is weakening and that the Syrian response has been convincing and the Syrian argument powerful....

"The Syrian people have discovered the falsehood of those Lebanese and the link between their positions and a conspiracy that targets Syria....

"Those who talk about a deal between Syria and the United States want to cast doubt on Syria's commitment to its positions and principles....

"Syria calls for transparent dialogue and rejects the logic of secret deals.... The signs of weakness among the champions of

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the campaign against Syria do not mean the battle is over. All these battles are doomed to failure because we have sufficient tools and will to foil them...."

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"Insulting Sanctities"

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Hasan Yusuf, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/2): "We condemn the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper and every encroachment on any religion in the world.... This is not the first time that Islamic sanctities have been insulted.... Why did no one call for a boycott of American products when the Koran was desecrated in Guantanamo and Al-Fallujah...?"

"Insulting sanctities is undoubtedly unacceptable, but remaining silent on an insult here and declaring anger at a similar insult there is something that raises questions.

"There are some active and growing forces in Norway and Denmark that want to support Arab rights in Palestine. This is why Zionists, through their agents in the media worldwide, work to drive wedges between Arabs and Muslims, on the one hand, and their potential friends, on the other...."

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